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ABSTRACT

Using photographs and informal narrative, three case studies illustrate the integration of handicapped with nonhandicapped students on a variety of age levels, and with a variety of special needs, at three locations in England. Charnwood, an independent preschool center in Stockport, Cheshire, serves 50 young children with a variety of disabilities (e.g., cerebral palsy, hearing impairments) integrated among a total of 170 children (ages birth to 5) attending opportunity groups and structured playgroups each week. Castlecroft (serving ages 3-11) and Smestow (for students ages 11-18) in Wolverhampton, West Midlands, are neighboring elementary and secondary schools which integrate students with visual impairment into the normal school environment. A supportive rather than protective environment is emphasized, with visually impaired students receiving needed special resources but the same curriculum as the nonhandicapped. Northumberland Park School in Haringey, North London, integrates 14 children with physical and sensory disabilities into a total of 1,100 students ages 11-18. Handicapped students remain on the rolls of two referring special schools, with support staff maintaining links between the special and integrated settings. (JW)

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Integration in practice

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Three case studies by Christine Orton
For the Centre for Studies on Integration in Education (CSIE)

THE SPASTICS SOCIETY

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Contents

Introduction	page 1
Charnwood — pre-school pioneers	page 2
Castlecroft and Smestow — working together	page 10
Northumberland Park — a city comprehensive	page 18
Information	page 24

CHRISTINE ORTON is a writer specialising in health, education and social issues. She has written extensively on integration in ordinary schools and recent publications include **I can't believe my eyes, report of an integrated adventure week (CSIE), The child with a medical problem in the ordinary school: Children with special needs a guide for parents (Home and School Council)** and **Integration — the way forward (CSIE).**

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Introduction

The Centre for Studies on Integration in Education (CSIE) was set up by The Spastics Society as one of its responses to the 1981 Education Act in July 1982. The Centre deals with the **whole** range of special needs not just cerebral palsy, and that range includes children with physical, sensory, mental and emotional needs.

One of CSIE's tasks is to raise public, professional, parental and political awareness to the issue of integration in education. Experience shows that it **is** possible to educate many more children together, in ordinary schools, with benefits for all.

Integration in Practice — 1,2,3. by Christine Orton illustrates three examples of different integration schemes. They have been written in a straightforward style, which gives basic facts and figures as well as the atmosphere of what happens in these schools. They include the integration of physically disabled students in a North London comprehensive school, Northumberland Park, in Haringey; the integration of blind and partially sighted children in a primary and secondary school Castlecroft Primary and Smestow, Comprehensive School in Wolverhampton and the integration of young children with a wide range of difficulties in an independent nursery school, Charnwood Nursery, in Stockport, Cheshire.

These three examples have been chosen to illustrate integration at different ages in different locations, and with children who have different special needs.

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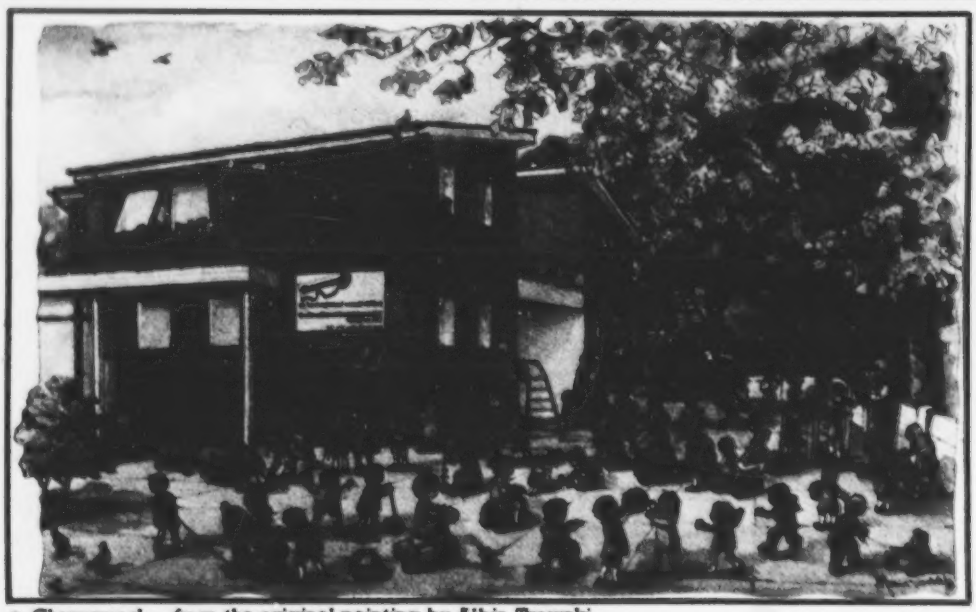
Charnwood — pre-school pioneers

Where: Stockport, Cheshire
Beginnings: Opened in 1959 as playgroup, expanding to an independent nursery centre in 1973 with new premises in 1979
Numbers: 50 children with a variety of disabilities integrated among total of 170 attending opportunity groups and playgroups. Fifteen have statements under the 1981 Education Act
Ages: Birth to 5 years — or older if appropriate
Aim: To help both disabled and ablebodied young children and their families to develop their potential and enjoy life to the full



• *Charnwood — from the original painting by Albin Trowski.*

Charnwood

Integration of special needs children into the ordinary world should start from the cradle believes Grace Wyatt, founder and head of Charnwood, an independent nursery centre in Stockport, Cheshire.

For this reason young babies, with or without special needs, can attend Charnwood's afternoon opportunity groups with their parents, and later move on to the morning playgroup alongside able-bodied under fives.

Of the 170 children attending Charnwood during a week one third have disabilities, ranging from rare medical syndromes and serious mental and physical disabilities to hearing, sight and communication problems.

'A scheme like ours has a good influence on home life, integrating parents as well as children,' Grace Wyatt comments. 'A special school placement from two or three years of age, separating a child from the family, may make mothers and fathers feel inadequate.

'At Charnwood parents don't feel rejected or isolated, and the positive effect on the whole family is helpful.'

It's 27 years now since Grace Wyatt started a small playgroup for 12 children in the dining room of her own home. Among the children was her neighbour's three-year-old daughter who had suffered brain damage following an attack of measles.

She felt that the atmosphere of the playgroup would be stimulating and encouraging for the child and also give the mother support. But her views on integration have not been shared by everyone and over the years as the playgroup grew and included more and more special needs children, there has been spasmodic outside opposition.

The first protests came when there were plans to move to a bigger house. Residents nearby objected on the grounds of noise.

Then twelve years ago when the playgroup had expanded to a nursery and was hoping to create its own purpose-built centre, planning permission was at first refused and local people circulated a protest petition, saying that it was too near shops and residential housing.

Each time Charnwood fought back and won, reasoning with local authorities, medical specialists, educationalists and public alike, circulating its own petition and continuing to believe that integration was the right philosophy.

Eventually planning permission for the new premises was granted and the £200,000 centre was built as a Manpower Services Commission project in 1976, halving Charnwood's enormous costs. More recently, Stockport education authority has offered financial help and for the past two years has given a grant of £15,000 per year towards the costs of the 40 Stockport children with special needs who attend.

As Grace Wyatt puts it succinctly 'Twenty-seven years ago we were considered cranks. Now we are pioneers. Charnwood has encouraged integrated schemes in this area and we are delighted when people come from all over the country here to see what happens.'

• *Grace Wyatt.*

Perfect setting

In spite of its fairly humble and homely beginnings, Charnwood certainly has the benefits of a perfect setting now. The modern brick building, with its open air balcony, has every sort of play facility, with some areas carpeted for comfort, others tiled for messy activities.

- There is a large sunken sandpit on the ground floor and thick rubber matting under all the climbing equipment so that active play can go on in safety.

- The comfortable parents' lounge has one-way mirror windows and microphones so that it can be used both for observation and as a therapy and assessment room.

- Outside there is an attractive garden and playground area which is also equipped with a wide variety of play opportunities, including climbing frames, swings, water and sand troughs, toy trucks and trollies.

What you don't see much of are wheelchairs, and this is all part of Charnwood's integration philosophy. The staff encourage children to fit into the everyday environment as much as possible, and many of the more disabled children get around with the help of sturdy wooden baby walkers, either pushing them or being pushed themselves.

Another interesting feature at Charnwood is that although the building was planned for integration, there are two floors linked by a staircase — and this was one of the reasons why the local authority refused planning permission at first. It felt that a staircase was unsuitable for under-fives with disabilities.

But in the view of Grace Wyatt and her staff, these young children have got to get used to stairs in the outside world, so the best place to start is Charnwood! 'In the end we got round the problem by calling it a *built-in climbing frame!*' she says.

'Of course we have ramps and slopes where necessary, but we have had more children learn to walk and cope with themselves on that staircase than in any other part of the building because it is a natural place for children to experiment.'

Structured play

In spite of this freedom, there is a well-ordered, peaceful air about the nursery, and the morning playgroup sessions are very structured, with a clear purpose to each activity for all the children, whether or not they have special needs.

The first hour and half of play with sand, paint, water, dough, jigsaw puzzles, constructional toys and home corner, encourages development of senses, language and manipulative skills. The music and story telling sessions which follow, aim to further language development, enlarge a child's vocabulary and help concentration.

Even milk and biscuit time is seen as an experience in self-help, self-awareness and socialisation. Lunchtime is used to help a small group of children with special social and eating difficulties to learn to relate to each other better.

The children are not allowed to leave toys and mess for others to clear up. Time is set aside in the morning for this to be done together. Later there is also a chance of one-to-one play and talk for some of the special need children and their parents before the afternoon opportunity group begins.

The opportunity group is attended by around 30 children of any age up to five, half of them with some type of disability, plus parents. In fact these groups are as much for the parents as the children, with advice and support for them as well as play for the babies and toddlers.

Charnwood also has a toy library open three times a month, with toys and play equipment especially designed to help children with special needs. Around 120 local families attend regularly, not just to return and borrow but to meet, make friends and find out more about coping with their child's needs.

Here they can learn about voluntary organisations which can give specialised help and support, or get straightforward information on the 1981 Education Act, the assessment process and statementing procedure.

• *'Charnwood staff feel that parents are experts anyway'.*

Children's progress

The only real proof of success, so far as the centre and its staff are concerned, is the enjoyment and continuing progress of the children who come here.

For instance, one of Charnwood's first pupils, Anne, had muscular atrophy, a progressive wasting disease of the muscles. She could hardly move without help, but propped up on cushions still took part in most of the play activities.

It was such a successful integrated start to her education that her parents were encouraged to insist on an ordinary infant, junior and comprehensive placement for her. Now 19, Anne has four A levels and is studying at a local polytechnic with the hope of going to university.

There are other similar success stories. One three-year-old, withdrawn and paralysed after major surgery and treatment for a brain tumour, became lively, outgoing and active in the playgroup atmosphere. Another child with a rare illness affecting speech and movement has now gone to ordinary school.

In every case Charnwood feels it is the mixing from an early age, of children with and without physical or mental problems which has directly led to improvement and progress.

Diane Weastell, senior teacher at Charnwood, worked for 12 years in a special school and has seen both sides of the picture. Although she feels the knowledge she gained in special school was invaluable, she prefers using this expertise in an integrated setting.

'If ever children can be integrated, it's at the pre-school age', she says. 'It's the rich quality of play among children that is so helpful. Sometimes the children with special needs are spectators, sometimes they play alongside, but they are learning all the time.

'They have got a model of language, play and ideas, and often it's the other children who do my job for me. In special education the children are totally dependent on the teacher's instructions. Here the special needs children see what is taking place and follow.'

Unexpected response

The first positive response to the new environment at Charnwood often comes in unexpected ways. One little boy with severe cerebral palsy was brought to Charnwood by his despairing mother because he cried almost all the time.

To begin with he cried at Charnwood, too, until one day he found himself in the middle of a battle in the sandpit. He laughed and joined in, and after that started taking part in other activities and enjoying them.

'The great thing Charnwood offers is the ordinary child's reactions and interest and vitality,' says Grace Wyatt. 'This sets a model for all sorts of behaviour, good and bad. But all children need to know how to be naughty sometimes, as well as how to behave in the approved manner.

'Coming here so young, we see dramatic improvements. Some children who at two years of age look as if they will need very special help leave here at five able to go to ordinary school. For this reason we sometimes have an agreement with the authorities to postpone statementing, as changes can be so great and we don't want children prematurely labelled.'

An interesting example of this approach in practice was the progress of Sally, a little girl with visual impairment, cerebral palsy and epilepsy who doctors had thought would need permanent care in a residential hospital.

Before she came to the playgroup she spent her time immobile and silent on a settee, showing little response to the life going on round her. But after a while at the play group she began to hum the nursery rhymes that the other children sang, and from these began to learn speech. By the time she left Charnwood she was crawling and using words herself, and is now at a school for children with visual impairment where she is reading braille, talking well and riding a bicycle with a guide.

Two-way gains

The gain among the children is two-way, all the under-fives learning from each other. From the earliest age those without problems accept those who have, and develop a compassion and understanding which the teachers feel stays with them for good.

Though what they see is occasionally potentially upsetting, such as a child having an epileptic fit or looking or behaving oddly, as long as this is handled by staff in a calm, matter-of-fact manner and talked about openly, other children absorb such happenings without shock or terror.

Far from thinking the integration scheme will hold their children back or disturb them, many parents of able-bodied children send them to Charnwood *because* of it.

One mother explained when she brought her daughter along that she and her husband had always felt so inadequate when faced by someone in a wheelchair or who was blind or deaf. They wanted their daughter to grow up in an atmosphere where she accepted disability as an ordinary part of everyday life.

There are two-way gains in the strong parental involvement at Charnwood as well. Many of the parents come in and help, and some have particular talents or qualifications such as speech therapy or physiotherapy, invaluable in a centre like this. Two have recently joined the staff on a part-time basis.

Other parents are trained teachers themselves and volunteer to swell the basic core staff which includes three full-time and five part-time teachers, plus a nursery nurse.

All attend training courses and conferences on special needs, and Charnwood in turn holds its own talks and training schemes for parents, volunteers and others interested in its work, particularly integration.

Parents and the public at large also do a great deal of fund-raising for the independent centre, which is still partially self-supporting. In addition to the local authority grant their income is increased by a minimal £2 charge for able-bodied children per daily playgroup session. Money still has to be raised by Charnwood just to keep going. Most staff are paid hourly rates but an attempt is now being made to pay a modest professional salary to the full-time teachers.

One of these teachers, Barbara Wright, originally came to Charnwood as a mother-helper with her son Jake, who has spina-bifida. She has, therefore, experienced at first hand the advantages of parent involvement.

'I was very depressed and lonely at the time we came here,' she says. 'It's so easy to feel isolated when your child has a disability. But helping at the school took me out of myself, and also taught me a great deal about my son's problems and how to help him handle them.

'I know from experience how important it is for mothers and fathers to feel that they are people of worth. But rather than sitting them down and simply giving advice, Charnwood involves everyone in a practical, helping way so we learn together.'

Charnwood staff feel that parents are experts anyway. They are needed to give advice as well as receive it, and this is all part of building up their self-esteem as well as the child's. A parent's presence is essential in the early years until the child has learned independence in the outside world necessary to graduate to playgroup.

The next step for most children, Charnwood always hopes, will be ordinary school, and they are happy to see that more and more local schools are starting integrated schemes. Mutual links are now excellent and Charnwood staff work closely with primary heads and class teachers, visiting each other's schools and discussing individual children.

Other local schools have special units catering for children with severe special needs, but still sharing in many of the lessons and the playtime of other pupils, and some Charnwood children attend these.

Whatever the placement Charnwood always emphasises the need for the child to have regular daily integration with ordinary local children and this is most effectively done in school. As Grace Wyatt says, 'There is after all only one world for the children to live in and it is crucial that they never lose contact with it.' □

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Castlecroft and Smestow — working together

Where: Wolverhampton, West Midlands
Beginnings: Castlecroft Primary School started integrating children with visual impairments in 1978; neighbouring Smestow Comprehensive School followed in 1979.
Numbers: 16 children integrated into a total of 240 pupils at Castlecroft; 19 into a total of 878 at Smestow all of whom have Statements under the 1981 Education Act
Ages: 3-11 at Castlecroft; 11-18 at Smestow
Aims: To support the individual education and pastoral needs of visually impaired children in the ordinary school environment

Castlecroft School

Walking through the brightly decorated corridors and classrooms of Castlecroft Primary School in the suburbs of Wolverhampton it is difficult to realise an integration scheme exists there, so easily do the children mix.

An enlarger tucked away in the corner of one classroom or two children quietly working away on a braille typewriter in another are the clues that show something a little different from the ordinary is being catered for here.

Castlecroft integrates visually impaired children into its nursery and primary classes, with the added bonus that the neighbouring comprehensive school, Smestow, can take these same pupils right through to school leaving age.

'Wolverhampton believes that by concentrating resources on particular schools for specific handicaps we make certain we bring to those with more serious disabilities the sort of help they need,' says Keith Tottman, Assistant Education Officer, Special Education.

'So just as Castlecroft and Smestow give special help to pupils with visual impairment and act as a resource centre in this field for the whole area, other schools cater separately for other disabilities such as profound deafness or severe physical handicap.'

In the 1970's following the publication of the Vernon Report recommending integrated provision where possible for visually impaired pupils, the Wolverhampton LEA was going ahead with plans for a special unit attached to a new special school for children with physical disabilities.

Change of plan

Then in 1977 Wolverhampton's first peripatetic teacher for children with visual impairment, who could visit them both at home and in school, was appointed. The LEA decided to switch the special unit to an ordinary school and aim for complete integration.

Castlecroft was chosen because it was considered a well-run school with an enthusiastic head. In addition the school was already planning a new nursery extension, and there was space to incorporate a resource centre for the visually impaired pupils, plus further classrooms for the whole school.

The specialist provision at Castlecroft eventually opened at the beginning of 1978 with the transfer of three children from a local special school, plus four more children a week later. Smestow, whose age range is 11-18, followed suit a year later with one blind pupil supported by the resource centre at Castlecroft.

Now there are 16 children with visual impairments in the nursery and primary school — six educationally blind and the rest partially sighted. Smestow has 19 pupils with visual impairment, and like Castlecroft has built up an impressive expertise and resource centre to provide for their special needs.

'It's hard to estimate costs of a scheme like this and compare it with the cost of special education,' comments Keith Tottman. 'But if you have 16 children and you send them away to residential school that's going to be as much as £9,000 a year each, or £10,000 with hidden extras. That's £160,000 a year.

'With the initial cost of setting up resources and aids for a scheme like that at Castlecroft and Smestow, plus travel for pupils, staffing and training, it will probably be a similar sum to provide special education in an ordinary school. We just think this is a preferable way.'

But the initial cost is, of course, a one-off expenditure for the Local Authority.

Continuing success

The present head of Castlecroft, Julian Watson, thinks there are specific reasons why the school's integration scheme works well. 'The large amounts of time spent informing parents and existing pupils initially was very helpful, and we have continued this policy,' he says. 'But the school is now so well known that parents send their children already aware that we take children with visual impairment. It is an accepted and valued part of our school life.

'It also makes a difference that the scheme was started using existing staff. A teacher who had been here 11 years went off and trained and came back with specialist knowledge to be head of the resource team. Careful forward planning and organisation was essential.'

Other helpful factors listed by Julian Watson include:

- The school has team teaching rather than class-based teaching which he believes encourages a co-operative feeling, open to specialist support.
- The four teams at Castlecroft — nursery, infants, lower juniors and upper juniors — have four teachers each, plus two teachers specially trained to teach children with visual impairment, who are shared between the infant and junior classes.
- The teachers are all interested in learning more about children with special needs. Four at Castlecroft have already attended a 12 month in-service training course at Birmingham University and two more will be going shortly.
- A great strength for Castlecroft and Smestow are the two peripatetic teachers actually based at the schools and involved with the children with visual impairments right from birth to school-leaving age.

'Whenever a young child is identified as having a sight problem our peripatetic teacher visits the home, chats to parents, takes toys, books, supplies of activities and games, tape recordings, electric organs and so on,' explains Julian Watson. 'These visits continue on a regular basis once or twice a month depending on need, and we also have coffee mornings when parents come in with their pre-school children.

'The Smestow teacher takes over when the children are 11, continuing contact between family and school. The peripatetic staff are seen as part of the main school staff. It's a great help, because peripatetics are usually physically removed, based in their own homes or in the education office, rather than within the school.'

Yet another useful appointment is that of the mobility officer for the two schools who deals with transport, living skills and generally helping the pupils find their way around. Her job also includes home visiting, which creates another link between school and family.

Teaching standards

Pam Francis, head of Castlecroft's resource area, has been at the school for 17 years and remembers it before the start of the integration scheme. In her view it has always had a pleasant and caring atmosphere, but she thinks the special pupils have brought about even greater advantages for the school as a whole.

'Because we are teaching those with special needs, this improves *all* teaching,' she points out. 'The children without visual impairments have their own problems, and even though poor vision can be responsible for handwriting or reading difficulties, many of the fully-sighted children need extra help, too.

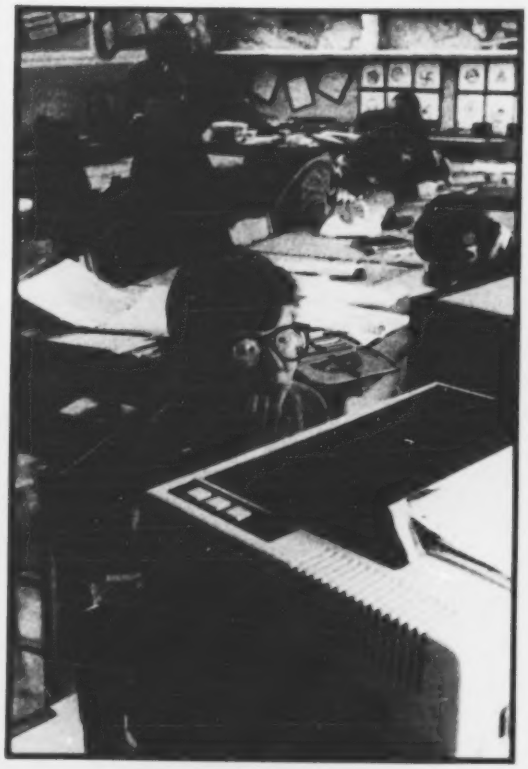
'There is a wide variety of abilities among the children and we try to cater for their individual needs, but all the children are treated in the same way. We give them the same broad curriculum, though obviously the children with visual impairment need help in using special aids such as the word enlargers or computers. We also find that the Vincent Workstation, which centralises all the necessary special aids and equipment in the class, makes a big difference to integration.

'Some parents may worry at the beginning that their children without a disability may receive less attention. But I make the point that if anything they will get more, because there is a greater awareness of individual needs and a higher pupil/teacher ratio.'

Pam Francis, like other teachers at Castlecroft and Smestow, thinks the school's success with visually impaired pupils is because of the specialisation in this particular disability. The right resources are essential and though it would be nice to have them in every school in the area, as things stand this would be financially impossible.

A potential drawback is that for some of the special pupils, Castlecroft and Smestow are not their neighbourhood schools, and they have to travel daily many miles by taxi and bus from other towns and counties. This can mean missing out on some after-school activities and home friendships, and occasionally leads to a loss of contact with parents for the school.

However, most of the children with visual impairments would be even further from home if they took the alternative and were placed in special residential schools. The primary and comprehensive also work hard to compensate for this drawback by making extra travel arrangements when necessary, and by encouraging parental involvement in school events and assemblies.



Moving house

Francine and John White moved house and changed jobs so that Castlecroft and Smestow could become neighbourhood schools for their daughters Corienda aged 11, and Abigail aged 9.

Both Francine White and her husband are almost totally blind, and the two girls are partially sighted. But the parents' experience in special and residential schools when young themselves made them all the more determined that the girls should attend ordinary schools.

'The special school world is very over-protective and sheltered and you are given the impression if you are reasonably intelligent that you are the cream,' says Francine. 'When my husband left a college for the blind and went to an ordinary polytechnic, he couldn't cope socially. It is such a shock when you are no longer the big fish in a little pool.'

These parents feel that the behavioural and social effects of attending ordinary school are as important as the educational ones. Only recently at a hospital check-up with the girls, their mother was asked by a play leader why her children were so different from others with visual impairments.

'She had noticed that a lot of partially sighted and blind people are full of mannerisms, whereas Corienda and Abigail are not. They look directly at people, walk well, cross the road confidently, ride their bikes up and down the street and go skating and swimming.

'They have lots of sighted friends, and I like the way they treat the girls, not singling them out and talking to them differently. That's exactly right and how it should be.'

Smestow School

Corienda has now moved on to Smestow Comprehensive. Like all the children with visual impairments from Castlecroft and other local primary schools, she started going over to the other school for one day a week during the term before transferring to get used to the feel of the new building.

The school now has a specially trained teacher to head the resource unit, and staff include two qualified welfare assistants and the school-based peripatetic teacher. Much of the work done in the resource unit ensures that the pupils can follow the same curriculum as their contemporaries, right through to O and A level examinations.

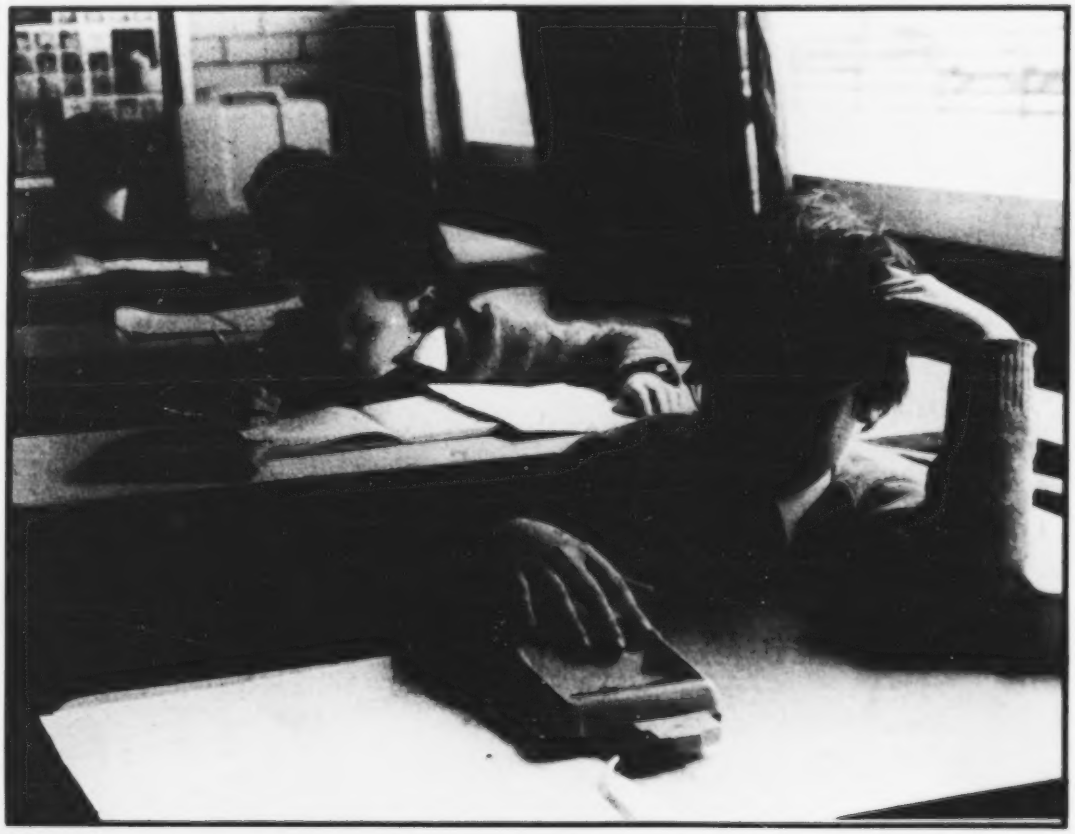
The unit has a variety of visual aids:

- There is a library so that the students can use the same set of books.
- There are also braille machines for pupils to use and for copies to be made of exam papers, etc.
- There are facilities to make tactile diagrams and drawings when necessary.
- A photo-enlarger can take print to two or three times its normal size.
- Closed circuit television and tape recorders are also used, and the pride and joy of both Castlecroft and Smestow are the braille word processors which use synthesised speech as well as print outs.

As at Castlecroft, the Smestow pupils with visual impairments spend the majority of their time in the ordinary classroom, carrying smaller equipment such as hand-held lenses, talking calculators, tape recorders or lamps with them.

'As they get older and come into the comprehensive, the children start understanding somewhat more sophisticated technology,' says headmaster Leslie Cox. 'All those with visual impairments have different disabilities and needs and won't necessarily need the same equipment.

'Blindness isn't an absolute thing. Much can be done with residual vision, and new technology is pointing us in exciting directions, bringing potential out. Those with poor sight are learning to handle sophisticated equipment and they will be able to use these skills when they leave for a career.'



Early identification of sight problems is crucial for success, Leslie Cox feels, and to ensure this happens Castlecroft and Smestow have joined with the local education authority in producing general guidelines for detection. They run special courses for other schools, and help on LEA special education courses for all teachers in the area.

Both schools also come together for regular meetings with the LEA's special education department, social services, medical advisers and everyone else involved in the assessment process and statementing procedure under the 1981 Education Act. They are consequently able to monitor and discuss the progress of individual children as they move from year to year.

Supportive not protective

Doug Hughes, head of Smestow's resource centre, is understandably proud of the school's up-to-date equipment and supportive atmosphere. But he is also very down to earth about how integration should work.

'We try and help with any problems and naturally we talk with the first year pupils and their parents as they are settling in. There is a leaflet explaining our integration scheme. Even so, I want to make an environment which is going to be supportive and not protective, and we try to encourage the pupils with visual impairments to be as independent as possible.

'At the beginning I wanted handrails everywhere, but not now. If there's stuff lying about I leave it there. They've got to cope with the big, wide world eventually, so they must get on with it now.

'They've got to go into strange rooms and be prepared for the unexpected. We have them on the lathes in woodwork, jumping on the trampoline and doing all sorts of things, and we are only as protective as we would be to any other pupil.'

Anne who is now 17 and is blind was in the first group of pupils to start at Castlecroft and also the first to transfer to Smestow. She was at a special school until she was ten, and though she was quite happy there, much prefers being educated in an ordinary setting.

'At first I think some of the sighted children thought I was deaf or ignorant and didn't know how to treat me,' remembers Anne. 'But then we talked and got friendly and began to understand each other, and I started to like the school a lot.'

Anne gained 5 O and 2 A levels before leaving Smestow, an achievement which was at least as good and in many cases much better than her sighted classmates. Now she is doing a secretarial course at the local further education college, which she chose in preference to one at a special residential college for the blind.

She is one of the first blind students to go there, and already her presence is making itself felt. The college have started building up their own resource unit to cater for more young people with visual impairments in the future. □

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Northumberland Park — a city comprehensive

Where: Haringey, North London
Beginnings: Started as a pilot scheme in 1976 integrating children from Blanche Nevile School for pupils with hearing impairments, followed a year later by pupils with physical disabilities from the Vale Special School.
Numbers: 14 children with physical and sensory disabilities, plus large number with other special needs, integrated into total of 1,100 pupils. All 14 have statements under the 1981 Education Act.
Ages: 11-18
Aim: To give children with disabilities all the educational opportunities they would have if they did not have any special needs.

Northumberland Park

For those who feel that integration can only happen successfully in an otherwise problem-free school, preferably in a middle class area out of town, a visit to Northumberland Park Comprehensive would open their eyes.

Northumberland Park School, just off a busy main road in Haringey, North London and close to Spurs football ground, copes with all the potential tensions of a typical inner-city school. Yet it is happily integrating a large number of physically disabled children among its 1,100 pupils.

Deputy head Pat Fitton feels the integration scheme is actually to the school's advantage. From her experience of the past five years the atmosphere and quality have been enhanced.

'There is a high percentage of children here with a variety of special needs, from a neighbourhood where poverty and deprivation get worse and where people come from many different cultural backgrounds,' she says.

'But compared with many city schools, one of the effects of having disabled children here is that other pupils are genuinely more considerate. There is never any shortage of help, carrying bags and books, holding doors open or pushing wheelchairs. Their consciousness has been raised by having disabled children in their midst.'

Headmaster Geoff Smith agrees and thinks the benefits are enormous. 'We never have that *"staring syndrome"* in our school' he comments. 'Ablebodied and disabled children learn to accept each other and it is helpful to both. Integration is an education process in itself — an education for life.'

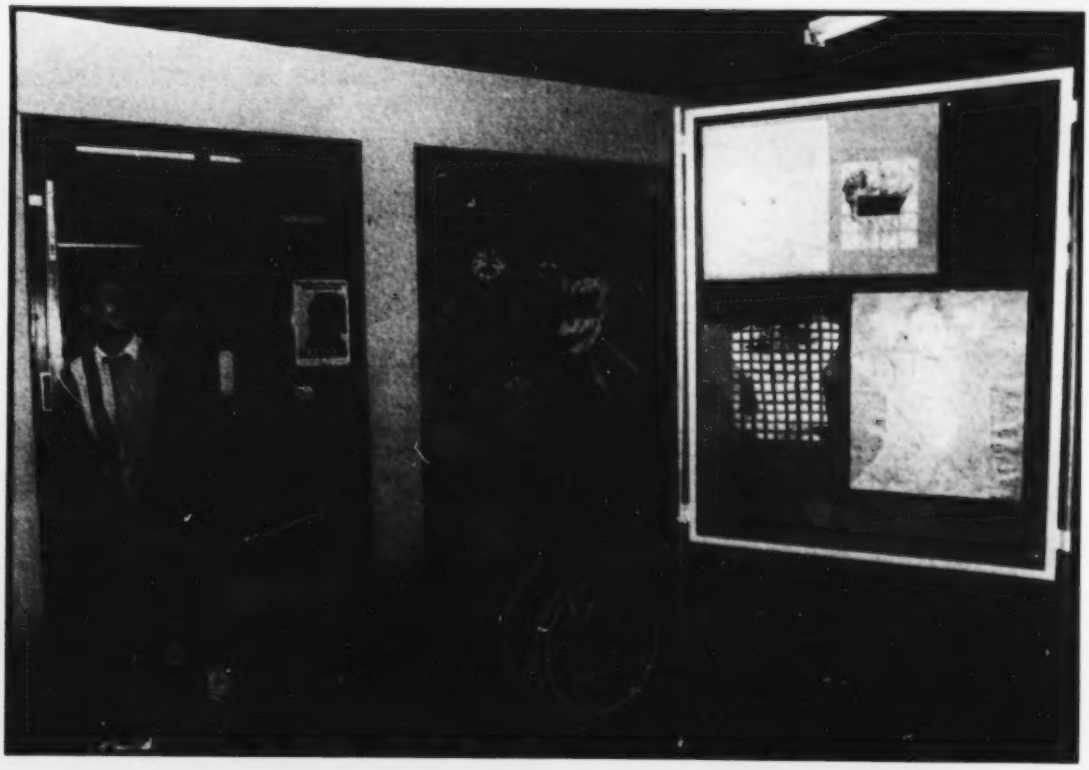
Pilot project

The scheme started at Northumberland Park ten years ago as a pilot project for Haringey education authority. This 11-18 comprehensive school had already been taking children with hearing impairments from the local Blanche Nevile special school, and the then headmaster was asked to take three physically disabled pupils from the nearby Vale special school.

Now there are 14 children with complex physical and sensory disabilities at the comprehensive, including six with cerebral palsy, two with spina bifida, two with muscular dystrophy, two with hearing impairment plus others with conditions such as asthma and epilepsy.

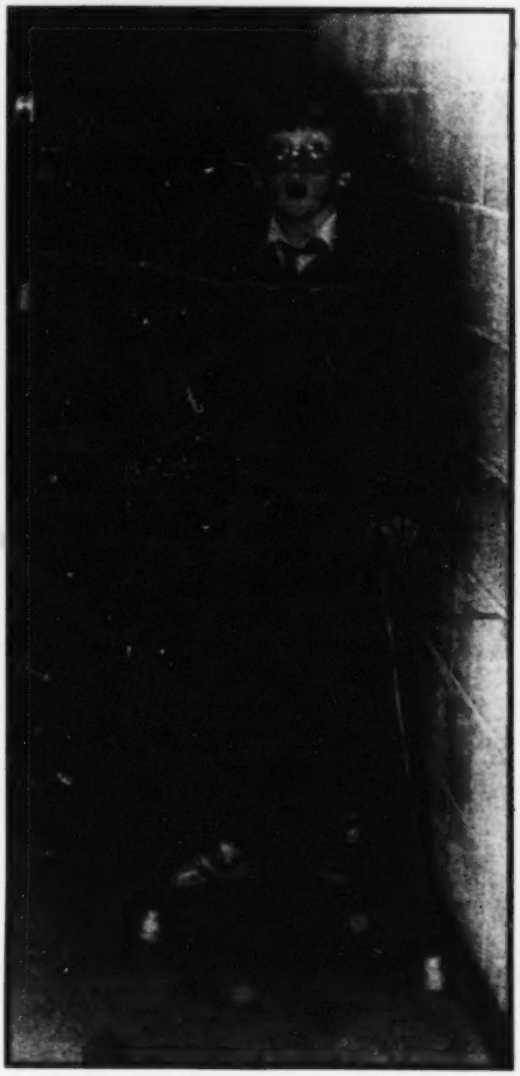
'The main criterion for coming to this school is that the children are within the ordinary range of ability of secondary school,' says Pat Fitton. 'At present this means that they might need remedial help or even second language help, but won't be mentally handicapped.

'One day we would like to include all disabilities, but as the mother of a multi-handicapped daughter myself, I understand the very real difficulties and readjustments of teaching that mental handicap would involve. But it does seem to me astonishing that integration of physically disabled children who don't have particular learning difficulties hasn't proceeded much more speedily in all schools. Although there are challenges, these can be overcome.'



Physical access

In Pat Fitton's experience the question of general physical access to the school is relatively easy. Even though Northumberland Park has not been drastically altered to accommodate the children and is on two floors covering quite a large area, children in wheelchairs and those using walking aids get around very well.



- Ramps and rails have been added to create access to buildings, including mobile classrooms outside. Some of these were built with the help of pupils in the sixth form.
- The old service lift which was already at the school when the integration scheme started will take wheelchairs and is regularly used by disabled pupils.
- There were originally two wide access toilets, one for the boys and one for the girls. But a newly converted suite of rooms, formerly the medical unit, provides more toilet facilities.
- The new unit also includes a physiotherapy room with a special adjustable couch, and provides greater privacy for those who may be incontinent and need changing at certain times of the day, or who need some form of treatment.

The newly converted unit is *'home-base'* for Rene Wallen, one of the two welfare assistants who take care of the more practical aspects of integrating children with illness or disability. Mrs Wallen thinks that the unit is making a great difference to the smoother running of the integration scheme.

She has been trained by physiotherapists, and pupils needing exercises can go to her at various times during the day. She also deals with splinting of limbs and giving out medication.

Rene will accompany some children to classrooms for certain lessons such as cookery if they need help in lifting pots and pans, turning taps or reaching other equipment. But on the whole she tries not to do more than is absolutely necessary, following the school's aim to encourage independence as much as possible.

She also tends to act as unofficial counsellor, and attending to pupil's physical needs will often be the first to hear about their emotional and social worries as well. Again, she tries not to make them seem too special or protected.

'Sometimes they feel they're being teased. I tell them that's the sort of teasing everyone gets, and surely they don't want to be treated differently? But they know that if there are any real problems they can tell me, and if necessary I will pass them on.'

The school has a strong pastoral system. Integration was really taken on board as part of the school's general philosophy and, as Pat Fitton points out, there is a very caring approach to individual children.

All the children with special needs belong to tutor groups within their year and the teacher in charge deals with their work, behaviour, discipline and relationships with home, the same as for all other children.

Support links

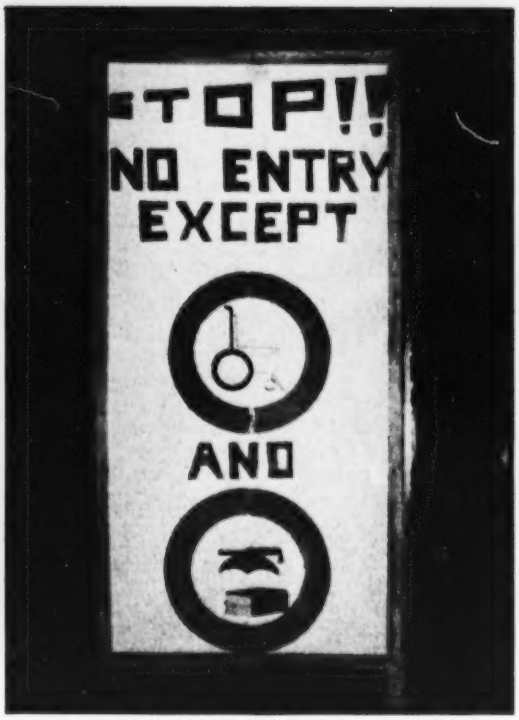
Although all the disabled children are full-time at Northumberland Park, they remain on the roll of The Vale School and Blanche Nevile School, and if there are any major difficulties these will be referred back for discussion to the respective special school.

There are also full and part-time link support teachers from Blanche Nevile and from The Vale, who divide their time between the special schools and Northumberland Park.

Moira Challen works from The Vale School and one of her jobs is to prepare teachers, parents and pupils at the comprehensive for the integration of children who are disabled. She is present right from the first meetings between the two schools to discuss a particular child's suitability and will liaise between schools, child and parents from then on.

She arranges regular talks for teaching staff, from medical specialists and other experts on the various disabilities that the children have, such as cerebral palsy and spina bifida, and the school has produced a booklet which gives information on a range of conditions.

Teachers are also shown how to deal with epileptic fits and there are regular fire drills which include coping with wheelchairs and less mobile children. Moira Challen also arranges tutorials for the pupils, explaining various disabilities and the special problems that those who have them face in daily life.



'I visit the child's home when necessary, helping sort out difficulties over transport, treatments or lessons as they arise,' she says. 'When it comes to O and A levels there may be practical problems over writing. Pupils might need extra time or to use a tape recorder or computer, and I will arrange this.

'Or they may need special advice on career choice and training. It will be my job to talk to the pupil concerned and arrange meetings with career advisers, social workers and medical specialists involved.'

'Blanche Nevile link support teachers work in a similar way with the hearing impaired pupils, also giving practical help with communication when necessary during lessons.'

Teaching aids

Though the other teachers can draw on this practical and educational support, they are not expected to take total responsibility for the special needs of pupils in their class or tutor group. Even so, many find that a natural interest draws them into devising new and ingenious ways of helping them cope with the ordinary curriculum.

Sometimes the answer to a problem comes from the pupil's own inventiveness. One boy with spinal muscular atrophy could not manage practical carpentry. By resting a specially designed plastic drawing board on his wheelchair he did excellent plans, turning the board round and drawing upside down when he couldn't reach the far side. Now he has an A level in art and is studying at art college for a fine arts degree.

Similar problems of access and use of equipment can arise in the science laboratories. A pupil with brittle bones found the answer for her was a swivel chair on wheels which she could lever up and down to reach the different levels of benches and tables.

The head of the science department, Frank Solarz, has also designed special computer programmes which enable some students to carry out experiments by computer rather than using test tubes and bunsen burners.

Modern technology, allowing students to work out how much alkali is needed to neutralise an acid or to produce a complicated diagram or graph by way of keyboard, screen and print-out has helped tremendously to integrate students into the ordinary curriculum.

Protection and supervision is all important in subjects like crafts and science, but teachers feel that pupils with disabilities should be involved as actively as possible according to individual potential.

Though the school must take some precautions, such as allowing certain children out of classrooms a few minutes before lessons end to avoid the crush in corridors, the general principle is to give the least protection necessary for the safety and comfort of pupils.

Even discipline is the same, and when one group of disabled boys managed to kick a ball through one of the school windows, breaking the glass, they were kept in for detention like anyone else and made to pay compensation.

Truly Comprehensive

By having an integration scheme like this in operation, headmaster Geoff Smith says that the school is learning all the time about what is needed to provide successfully for special needs.

'Over the years an enormous amount of expertise is building up' says Geoff Smith, 'You realise that in the laboratory high stools need back supports, and in business studies there must be wheelchair circulation space. Cookery units must be lowered, and sinks available with taps that you pull rather than twist. There must also be special training for teachers and extra welfare staff. And above all the flexibility to be able to alter the curriculum when necessary.

'The cost is not insignificant and integration can't be done on the cheap. Perhaps because of our experience we are being listened to. We have pressed the Local Authority and eventually the aids and extras we think necessary are being provided.'

It is essential to cater for these needs, he believes, so that alongside their more ablebodied age group the children with disabilities can do similar activities as equals, rather than being treated in a token manner.

'You need to have a wide vision, and as a school we take this very seriously. It's not always the big things but the smaller details that are important, and you have to be very sensitive to these.'

The result, he feels, is that pupils with physical disabilities in the ordinary school grow up with a different kind of confidence. They leave school with a more positive attitude to life which allows them to stand up for their rights and be more assertive.

'One of the sixth-form boys with muscular dystrophy hammered away at the LEA so that he could attend the local further education college. He wasn't just fighting for his own future, but for that of others with special needs, and he was prepared to confront the system.'

'I don't think it is possible to achieve the dimensions he envisaged yet, but he sowed the seeds and made people stop and think.'

Geoff Smith's view is that Northumberland Park shows that integration is part of the comprehensive principle. Eventually he would like the school to look towards integrating an even greater degree of disability, including the consideration of mentally disabled children.

'There will be those who will benefit for a short time, some for much longer, some only in a social sense during breaks,' he says. 'But I would like to be building towards this.

'I believe in comprehensive education in its widest sense, and would like this school to cater for special needs children to the fullest extent.'□

Information

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